

How to Handle Criticism?

Sunil P.V.* and Manjusha U.

Technician, SEETTD, CMFRI, Cochin

Email*: sunilecmfri@gmail.com

55

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain but it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving-Dale Carnegie

Introduction

Compared to all other nations Constitution of India guarantees to all its citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. People's everyday lives are shaped through language and communication. They choose what to do with their time based on opinions and ideals formed through the discourse they are exposed to and Criticism is an inevitable part of the environment that surrounds us.



Criticism is painful and praise feels good for both men and women. What other people think affects women more dramatically though. Women are relationship oriented. When people don't like what they are up to, it can feel like disharmony or a break in their relationships, which they deeply value. Women pick up more information about what others think. A host of studies show women are more adept at reading facial expressions and body language than men. For most of history, women couldn't protect themselves through legal, political, or financial means. Research shows that when women get negative feedback, it tends to be more personal than the feedback men get. It can also be more angry and even violent or vulgar, especially in our internet age.

It is true that we face criticism in our day to day life and when somebody criticizes, it feels bad and depressing. Nobody likes being criticized but, unfortunately it is a fact of life. To be able to respond to criticism with nobility and detachment is an important life skill, which few people have. If we respond to criticism without careful consideration, it can easily lead to unnecessary suffering.

Dealing with criticism positively is an important life skill. At some point in your life you will be criticized, perhaps in a professional way. Sometimes it will be difficult to accept – but that all depends on your reaction. You can either use criticism in a positive way to improve, or in a negative way that can lower your self-esteem and cause stress, anger or even aggression.

Definition: Criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature, artwork, film, and social trends. The expression of disapproval of someone or something on the basis of perceived faults or mistakes

The words "critic" and "critical" existed in the English language from the mid-16th century, and the word "criticism" first made its appearance in English in the end of 16th century (primarily literary criticism) on Samuel Johnson's contemporary Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*.

Advantage and disadvantage of criticism

- When people criticize, it can have a fruitful, enriching and constructive effect on the recipient, because new ideas and viewpoints may be generated in trying to solve a problem.
- People can also be hurt by criticisms, when they experience the criticism as a personal attack.
- At some point in your life you will be criticized, perhaps in a professional way. Sometimes it will be difficult to accept – but that all depends on your reaction. You can either use criticism in a positive way to improve, or in a negative way that can lower your self-esteem and cause stress, anger or even aggression.
- Criticism is a form of communication. If someone has a criticism on what you're doing for them – that means an opportunity to learn more about the person who you're working for and how to convert them into a satisfied customer or audience member. Feedback helps make your product stronger.
- Some individuals are critical by nature and do not always realise that they are hurting the feelings of another person.

Dealing with criticism- Procedure

I) Change Your Perspective

a) Know the difference between destructive and constructive criticism.

Constructive criticism is, ideally, meant to help you. Destructive criticism is only intended to cause hurt. You have to know where the feedback is coming from and understand the intentions of the person who is giving it to you. If it's a teacher or a superior, then chances are the person only wants you to perform better; but when it's coming from a supposed friend, or even an enemy, then you have to wonder whether or not the person has your best interest in mind.



b) Accept that you're not perfect. Nobody's perfect, so if you think you're perfect, then you're nobody. Okay, but seriously: every person has flaws, and if you don't see any of yours, then you're not analyzing yourself as closely as you should.

c) Don't take it personally. If your boss says you've been a little less productive than usual lately, it's not because he thinks you're fat and lazy; it's because he wants you, his employee, to step up your game. If the criticism is constructive, then it's intended to guide you and to help you improve as a

person, not to bring you down and make you feel inadequate. If your teacher has given you rather critical feedback on a paper, it's not because she thinks you're stupid or annoying in class; it's because she thinks you have some work to do when it comes to making an argument.

- d) Work on being less sensitive.** If you always find yourself crying, getting defensive, and feeling generally upset when someone gives you what was supposed to be helpful feedback, then you have to start thickening your skin. Think about where the message is coming from. Control your emotions.



II) Dealing with Constructive Criticism

Constructive criticism is designed to point out your mistakes, but also show you where and how improvements can be made. Constructive criticism should be viewed as useful feedback that can help you improve yourself rather than put you down. When criticism is constructive it is usually easier to accept, even if it still hurts a little. In either scenario always try to remember that you can use criticism to your advantage.

- a) Understand what you're really being told.** If you want to deal with criticism, then you have to understand the message behind it. Then you have to break it down so you can start figuring out what to do next. Sometimes, you may be focused on the hurtful aspects of the feedback and your pride may be too wounded for you to see what is right in front of you.
- b) See if there's some truth to it.** If the feedback is coming from a person who has your best interest in mind, then you have to consider the possibility that there really is some truth to those words.
- c) Make a game plan for addressing it.** You've got to write down the thing you need to work on, and make a plan for addressing it. This can take a long time, and it's never too late to start. Once you come up with a plan, a way of adjusting your expectations and actions, you can begin to address the criticism and become a better person.
- d) Thank the person for being honest (if he's also being kind).** If you have received some criticism that was delivered in a friendly and helpful way, or just in a way that was meant to be honest and clear, then take the time to thank the person and to say that you appreciate the fact that the person told you something that can make you an even better friend, girlfriend, student, or professional. Thanking people who give you honest criticism is also a sign of maturity. Suck it up and say "thank you" even if you're gritting your teeth.

- e) **Stop making excuses.** If you get defensive and make excuses, then the person won't be able to finish telling you exactly what he or she means, and you won't get the information you need to really improve. It's natural that we feel defensive and get the feeling that we can do no wrong, but it's important to hear people out before you cut them off to prove you're perfect.
- f) **Remember that constructive criticism can make you a better person.** Sure, it's tough to deal with even the most well-meaning criticism, especially if you're convinced you're perfect and that you can do no wrong. But if you're so invested in being an awesome person, then remind yourself that being aware of your flaws and shortcomings and making a plan for addressing them will make you an even more amazing person.

III) Dealing with Destructive Criticism

- a) **Understand the person's true motives.** If you have recognized the criticism as completely destructive and hurtful, then you can think about why the person might have said such a thing to make yourself feel better.
- b) **Look for the grain of truth.** Okay, so maybe the criticism was delivered in a way that was completely mean, unnecessary, and hurtful, and most of the things that were said were way off base.
- c) **Remember that words can never hurt you.** Remind yourself that criticism only consists of a bunch of words.
- d) **Stay confident.** Maintain your confidence. No matter what people are saying about you, you have to stay strong, remember who you are, and not let other people influence your own self-worth. Being confident doesn't mean thinking that you're flawless, but it does mean loving who you are and how you look.
- e) **Keep doing what you're doing.** If the criticism has no basis whatsoever, then the best thing you can do is to ignore it completely. Don't feel bad if you're not able to push all of these negative words aside right away. It takes practice to stop caring about what people think.

Activity Corner

Make a list of your 10 biggest flaws. Can you think of 10 things that need improvement? This exercise isn't meant to make you feel bad about yourself; it's only meant to make you see that you have room for improvement.

Summary

We all make mistakes all the time, it is human nature. As we go through life we have plenty of opportunity to learn and improve ourselves. Therefore, no matter what kind of criticism is aimed at you, analyse it to find something you can learn from it. If people formulate their criticism in the right way, it is more likely that other people will accept it. If the criticism is badly expressed, people might reject it, not because it is wrong in itself, but because they do not like being talked to in that way.

Tips

- If the criticism is faulty, ignore what has been said or contact the person who sent the criticism.
- Criticism means constructive advice pointing out your faults.
- You should be polite with people so that they will not use harsh words all the time.